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THE NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE CONFERENCE

Address by F. A. Silcox, Chief of the Forest Service, (Chairman of the North American Wildlife Conference), broadcast in the conservation day program, National Farm and Home Hour, January 17, 1936.

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You've heard old-timers tell of the vast herds of buffalo that once roamed our western plains -- of great flocks of passenger pigeons darkening the skies -- of the forests abounding in game of all kinds in pioneer days. Our country was once one of the world's richest in wildlife resources. With characteristic American efficiency we did a pretty thorough job of exploiting and depleting them. Today it's a different picture -- just how different I'll tell you in a minute.

Recognizing the need for immediate constructive action for the restoration and conservation of our wildlife, President Roosevelt has called a North American Wildlife Conference, to be held here in Washington from February the third through the seventh. The President's purpose in calling this conference, and mine in acceding to his request to act as its Chairman, is to bring together individuals, organizations and agencies interested in the restoration and conservation of wildlife resources. Through this Conference we hope to develop new cooperation between public and private interests, and between Canada, Mexico and this country. We hope that from this conference will come constructive proposals for concrete action; and that through these proposals existing State and Federal governmental agencies and conservation groups can work cooperatively for the common good.

The need for such work is urgent. Let me cite a few examples which have had direct and vital influence upon our present wildlife plight -- and let me remind you that every example -- and others I have not time to mention -- requires earnest thought and planned mass attack if our national wildlife resource is to be restored. Here they are: Some 85% of our lakes and streams, now polluted by industrial and municipal waste, affect recreation, public health and fish. One hundred million acres of original wildlife breeding grounds are now drained and the water tables are lowered. This aggravates the effects of drought, dust storms and floods and wreaks havoc on wildlife habitats. The Great Lakes and great stretches of coastal waters of both the Atlantic and Pacific, once huge reservoirs of game or commercial fish, now approach exhaustion in this respect. Eight wildlife species are extinct today. Wild turkey, prairie chicken, sage grouse, migratory waterfowl, mountain sheep, caribou, woodcock and other species exist only because of rigid protection. All species are reduced far below the social and economic needs of the country; more and more are approaching the shadow of oblivion.

It is to help correct such conditions as these that the North American Wildlife Conference has been called.

In order to develop specific objectives and a definite program, a Citizens Committee of 25 outstanding leaders in the field of conservation was appointed. This committee has outlined a program of action for the forthcoming Conference, and has extended, on behalf of the President, an invitation to the various Governors in the hope that each of them or his personal representative may attend. The Committee has also invited individuals, and thousands of national, regional and local groups, societies, unions and leagues interested in wild life to attend or send representatives.

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The three major objectives which the Committee has developed as fundamental purposes of the North American Wildlife Conference are: first, the organization of a permanent national federation of all agencies, societies, individuals and clubs with the avowed purpose of securing adequate recognition of the needs of wildlife resources. Second, the development of a national program for the advancement of wildlife restoration and conservation; and third, the presentation of such facts, discoveries and information pertinent to wildlife which may contribute to the solution of its problems.

The Conference is dedicated to the purpose of making effective the potential strength inherent in the many but scattered and often unrelated groups interested in wildlife conservation and restoration. To be a success, there must emerge from the Conference a permanent organization which will bring together the combined strength of all in the defense of wildlife resources. It must bring home to every citizen a more intimate appreciation of the value of the nation's diminishing wildlife resources.

Because the Conference attempts to gather a representative group by dealing with the many conservation agencies and organizations, this does not mean that only a selected list of delegates is invited to the Conference. Everyone interested in wildlife restoration and conservation will be welcome. The North American Wildlife Conference will be entirely autonomous. Its perpetuation and method of future representation and existence will be subject to its own decision.

For these reasons, and because the influences of a permanent organization will, I am sure, be welcomed by those officials of the Federal and State governments who have long needed support, the Committee hopes for a large, a representative and an interested and determined attendance. The success of this Conference will have much to do with future of wildlife on this continent, and its attendant social and economic influence upon the life of our people.

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